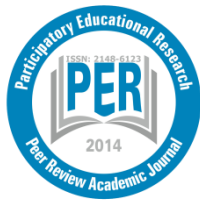TITLE: Successful School Principals in Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Schools: A Grounded

Theory Research from Turkish Context

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Successful School Principals in Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Schools: A Grounded Theory Research from Turkish Context

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The purpose of this study was to delve into the characteristics, professional competencies, leadership attitudes, and behaviors of successful school principals (SSPs) in socioeconomically disadvantaged schools. Utilizing a systematic grounded theory method (SGTM), we conducted research in the provinces of Amasya, Çorum, Samsun, and Tokat in Türkiye. Purposeful and theoretical sampling methods were employed to recruit successful school principals, deputy principals, teachers, students, and parents from secondary schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). The data draws on unstructured individual and focus group interviews, as well as documents and observations. All the data obtained were inductively analyzed through open, axis, and selective coding stages. Based on the codes, sub-categories, categories, themes, and dimensions from the analyses, we designed the Contextual Successful School Principalship Model (CSSPM), which falls into four dimensions as follows: individual, managerial, organizational, and instructional. SSPs in this study mostly tend to display paternalistic leadership attitudes and behaviors in terms of dedication and self-sacrifice, serving, intrinsic motivation, and influencing stakeholders. They exhibit almost all the attitudes and behaviors of servant leadership, act according to some national and moral values, and experience national attitudes such as patriotism and nationalism intensely. By giving importance to the academic socialization of students' mothers, successful school principals exhibit transformational and instructional leadership behaviors. They act strategically to directly involve mothers in enhancing student achievement, demonstrating their commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment.

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Introduction

The data obtained from the PISA 2018 exams on the factors affecting student achievement shows that there are students who exhibit significant academic success and social cohesion as a positive result despite all unfavorable conditions (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2019). The rationale for this situation is explained as the student's personal (e.g. motivation, academic resilience, etc.) or family factors as well as environmental ones (Ye, Strietholt, & Blömeke, 2021). In addition to personal and family factors that affect students' academic and social development, teachers, in particular, are among the most influential factors in the success of students (Yeager & Dweck, 2012), followed by the school principal in the context of environmental ones (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Andersen, & Wahlstrom, 2004). The impact of school principals' knowledge, skills, and behaviors on student achievement is among the common findings of researchers (e.g., Bush & Glover, 2014; Gu, Day, Walker, & Leithwood, 2018; Khalifa, 2012).

Successful school principal attitudes and behaviors, which have been shown to be effective in the academic and social success of socioeconomically disadvantaged students, have been seen to be the main problem statement of many studies in recent years (e.g., Gurr, Drysdale, Clarke, & Wildy, 2014; Klar & Brewer, 2013; Llorent-Bedmar et al., 2019; Meyers & Hambrick-Hitt, 2017; Michalak, 2009; Santaella, 2018). Studies on successful principals in socioeconomically disadvantaged schools generally focus on the skills, strategies and approaches of successful principals (Asiedu-Kumi, 2013), characteristics of successful principals (Abrams, 1998), effects of successful principals on student achievement (Onoye, 2004), leadership behaviors of successful principals in disadvantaged schools (Steagall, 2012), comparison of successful and unsuccessful principals (Druetzler-Katz, 2011), experiences of successful principals (Agnew, 2014), successful female principals (Bonomo, 2016), leadership styles of successful principals (Barnes, 2011) and successful principals creating professional learning communities (Smith, 2009). Collectively, these studies highlight the multifaceted nature of successful school principalship in challenging contexts, emphasizing the diverse competencies and strategies that contribute to student achievement and school improvement.

It is seen that the impact of school principals on students' achievement is generally addressed in those studies conducted in socioeconomically disadvantaged schools (Medina et al., 2014; OECD, 2019). Despite some common characteristics attributed to successful principals who make a difference for disadvantaged groups in disadvantaged schools (Grissom & Loeb, 2011), there is no road map, prescription, or recipe for successful principalship that will be valid in every country, every region, and every school (Day, 2007). Accordingly, the real-life practices of successful principals are shaped according to the contexts of the schools (Alqahtani, Noman, & Kaur, 2020). This situation is justified by the special conditions of each school arising from its own context (Grint, 2005).

Scholarly enquiry into successful school leadership has increased rapidly over the last two decades (Bush & Glover, 2014). On the other hand, the cumulative accumulation of knowledge on successful school principalship was provided by the multinational International Successful School Principal's Project (ISSPP) launched in 2001 (Jacobson, Day, & Leithwood, 2005). The The ISSPP examines schools with principals who are credited with their different teaching programmes and achievements (Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley, & Beresford, 2000; Johnson et al., 2008; Murakami-Ramalho et al., 2010). Studies conducted within the scope of the ISSPP (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008) have mapped the successful school leadership behaviors that increase learning outcomes and contribute positively to students'

academic achievement. In this context, the criterion for the identification of schools was to demonstrate higher achievement than expected in their own contextual conditions in the central examinations conducted in their own education systems, and the criterion for the identification of school principals was that the school principal was renowned for student achievement and school improvement (Leithwood & Day, 2007). According to the ISSPP, SSPs are united in some common leadership behaviors such as setting goals, developing individuals, developing the school, leading learning and teaching, regardless of country and school differences (Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki, & Giles, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2006; Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki, & Giles, 2009; Moos et al., 2008; Moos & Johansson, 2009).

The present study, however, addresses several critical gaps in the literature on school leadership, particularly in the context of socioeconomically disadvantaged schools. Firstly, the national literature has a noticeable scarcity of studies focusing on successful school principalship compared to international research (e.g., Ağaoğlu et al., 2012; Akbaba-Altun, 2011; Cemaloğlu & Duran, 2020). This research specifically fills this void by examining successful school principals (SSPs) in disadvantaged settings. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020) drew attention to the need for further understanding of what successful school leaders do, how they do it, and how success is gauged, with regard to different tactics and varied subject populations. To fill these gaps, our study has employed a grounded theory method with diverse participants. In addition, the findings of this study can help to specify the leadership practices that can contribute to the enhancement of educational outcomes in the conditions of disadvantaged schools, as well as provide the MoNE and other stakeholders with specific recommendations. Also, the study agrees with Özdemir (2017) on the need for more theoretically based applications in school leadership because this study presents practical information about the ways and means of successful school principalship. Thus, this study contributes to the existing literature by applying different contexts and participants to build upon the theoretical model with different data sources and to outline the future research agenda for successful school principalship in the similar socioeconomic environments.

Purpose of the Research

The main purpose of this study is to conduct a qualitative examination of the characteristics, professional competencies, leadership attitudes and behaviors, school culture and attitudes and behaviors towards teaching of successful principals in socioeconomically disadvantaged public schools. In line with this main aim, the following questions were sought to be answered.

(1) What are the distinctive personality traits of SSPs in Turkish context?
(2) What are the prominent professional competencies and the types of leadership SSPs exhibit?
(3) What are SSPs' attitudes and behaviors towards school culture?
(4) What are SSPs' attitudes and behaviors towards teaching?

Method

Research Model and Design

In this study, we employed the Systematic Grounded Theory Methodology (SGTM) as our research design due to several compelling reasons. Firstly, SGTM is recognized for its structured and clear approach, which enhances the clarity and rigor of qualitative research (Çelik & Ekşi, 2015, p. 182). This method allows for a more systematic analysis process, enabling the theory to be developed more coherently from the research problem. Additionally, SGTM facilitates a clearer presentation of the role of literature review within the systematic coding method, aligning with Dunne's (2011) observations. The process steps of axis coding in SGTM are more effective in associating categories during the theory-building process compared to other grounded theory designs. Furthermore, SGTM has been widely adopted in research on successfulprincipalship, providing valuable methodological comparisons and benchmarking opportunities. Creswell (2012, p. 424) also highlights the extensive application of SGTM in various educational research contexts, further justifying its selection for this study. By integrating SGTM, we aim to ensure a robust and comprehensive analysis that aligns with established qualitative research practices.

Participants

This research was conducted in Amasya, Çorum, Samsun and Tokat provinces in Türkiye. The participants were selected through the criterion sampling (Patton, 2002), maximum diversity sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and success case sampling (Brinkerhoff, 2003) methods. The participants of this study consisted of school principals [n = 29], deputy principals [n = 35], teachers [n = 331], students [n = 354], and parents [n = 280] in socioeconomically disadvantaged but successful schools according to certain criteria.

Identification of Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Successful Schools

In this study, a series of procedures were carried out to determine the schools characterised as socioeconomically disadvantaged schools. The two main criteria for identifying schools are being located in a socioeconomically disadvantaged region, or having socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and academic achievement. The basic criteria considered in the process of determining the schools defined as socioeconomically disadvantaged schools in this study and the data showing how these criteria were measured are given in Table 1:

Table 1. Criteria for Identifying Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Successful Schools

	Socioeconomically disadvantaged but academically successful schools	Theoretical Sample Selection Method	Indicator and Verification Source
1	Development status of the residential area where the school is located according to Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 categories of the statistical regional classification (TURKSTAT, OKA and Ministry of Development data),	Criterion Sampling	*SPO 1996, 2003 and 2004 SEGE, Ministry of Development 2011 SEGE and Ministry of Industry and Technology General Directorate of Development Agencies SEGE 2017 results.*
2	The high service points given to school administrators and teachers working in this school, which shows that the school is disadvantaged according to the classification of service regions and service areas as defined by the MoNE Service Regions.	Criterion Sampling	*"Service Regions, Service Areas and Service Points", which was prepared within the scope of the MoNE Regulation on Teacher Appointment and Relocation RG, 17.04.2005/29329" and updated in the Journal of Communiqués dated December 2018 and numbered 2735.*
3	Indicators of parents' employment status, income and education, which are also considered in the PISA exam	Criterion Sampling	*Declaration of school administrators in the second round after the schools are identified in the first round.*
4	The average of the school's 2016 and 2017 Transition from Basic Education to Secondary Education (TEOG) Exam results exceeding the average of the settlement (province-district) where it is located and the average of the school's 2018 and 2019 High School Entrance Exam (LGS) (TEOG) results exceeding the average of the settlement (province-district) where it is located.	Success case Sampling	*MoNE TEOG Statistics, Provincial and district Measurement-Evaluation Centres, Provincial and district Strategy Development Units, Provincial and district national education directors, provincial and district basic education branch directors.*
5	The school has a reputation for being successful both academically and in social and cultural areas.	Success case Sampling	*Provincial or district directorates of national education, basic education unit and assessment and evaluation centre, local and national news, analysis of information about the school on social media.*

This study was conducted in 29 socioeconomically disadvantaged schools. 31% of the schools were village schools [N= 9], 7% were town schools [N= 2]), 52% were distant district schools [N= 15] and 10% [N= 3] were located in the city center.

 Identifying Successful School Principals and Other Participants in Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Schools

In this study, the criterion sampling method, a type of purposive sampling, was used to select successful school principals (SSPs) in socioeconomically disadvantaged schools. The criteria for selecting SSPs were: (1) demonstrating consistent academic success in high-stake exams, (2) being located in a socioeconomically disadvantaged area, (3) having students socioeconomically disadvantaged, (4) having served at least three academic years in the current educational position, (5) gaining recognition for achievements both within and outside the school from internal and external stakeholders, and (6) being awarded by the MoNE, governorship, or district national education directorate at the provincial or district level as a

school principal. The demographic information of the socioeconomically disadvantaged successful schools and SSPs is presented in Appendix-1 and Appendix-2.

Data Collection

In this study, data were obtained from school principals, then deputy principals, teachers, students and parents through qualitative interviews. In addition, the observations made by the researcher during the school visits and interviews and the notes (memos) taken as a result of these observations are also among the main data sources for the research. In addition, social media accounts and other written and visual materials were examined to support and compare the data obtained through interviews, ensuring triangulation and enhancing the validity of the findings.

Data Analysis

SGTM data analysis has two main differences from content analysis: constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling (Cho & Lee, 2014). Gregory (2010) states that in SGTM analysis, researchers should constantly make comparisons between data and concepts, concepts and categories, data, categories, and data slices obtained from different data sources in order to obtain the abstract perspective leading to theory (p. 7). The analyses of the qualitative data obtained were carried out according to the coding stages of open coding, axis coding and selective coding steps according to the basic principles of SGTM.

When all analysis processes were evaluated, 11706 codes were obtained as a result of open coding, 257 subcategories and 65 categories were conceptualised under 16 themes as a result of axial coding. During selective coding, one category was determined as the core category and other categories and subcategories were combined around the core category to form a four-dimensional theory.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

In this study, the steps suggested by Creswell (2012), Strauss and Corbin (2008), Corbin and Strauss (2015) and Flint, Woodruff and Gardial (2002) were followed for trustworthiness in the context of SGTM. The following table presents the steps taken to meet the criteria of trustworthiness of the given study. Various aspects like credibility, transferability, and reliability were ensured to the best of the researcher's abilities. Enhanced greater confidence and credibility of the research findings are data triangulation and prolonged engagement. Thus, the strategy of applying these criteria ensures the methodological rigor and trustworthiness of the research study. These steps and criteria are given in Table 2:

Table 2. Trustworthiness Criteria

Dimensions	Criteria
Credibility	Since data were obtained from different stakeholders (school principal, deputy principal, teachers, students, and parents) and from written and visual data sources (official documents, school websites, news about the schools and school principals, social media platforms), comparisons were made to ensure consistency between the data obtained.
Transferability	The codes, categories, and themes obtained through theoretical sampling were expressed by the participants. There is a wide range and diversity of participants in the research.
Reliability	Interviews were recorded.
Confirmability	The data obtained throughout the research were transcribed and categorized.
Prolonged Engagement	Data were collected from the participants in three stages, involving a long-term interaction process.
Data Triangulation	National and international literature were analyzed during the stages of creating data collection tools and evaluating the findings obtained through content analysis. In addition to school principals, data were obtained from multiple sources such as assistant principals, teachers, students, parents, school strategic plans, school websites, news, projects, competitions, researcher observation notes, and social media.
Thick Description	The findings were coded in detail, and codes were created. Examples from the participants' statements were provided to illustrate the codes.
External Audit	The raw data and codes obtained from the research are stored in written and digital form and are open to external audit upon request.
Coherence	The data related to the phenomenon were focused on, and data were obtained for the formation of the theoretical model.
Member Checking	The data obtained from the research were confirmed by the participants, who were allowed to make additions and subtractions.

Ethical Considerations

Any private information of the participants was not included in the research. In terms of confidentiality, we took care to keep the data obtained in a way that third parties could not access them. In terms of anonymity, there is no information that would reveal the identities of the participants.

Findings

Open Coding Findings

As a result of open coding of the interviews with school principals, 8869 open codes were produced, 213 from deputy principals, 889 from teachers, 883 from students and 852 from parents, totalling 11706 open codes. For the exhaustive list of these codes, one can refer to the first researcher's doctoral thesis, available in the YÖKTEZ database. The original version of the dissertation can be accessed at the National Thesis Center of Türkiye [https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/] under the identification number 740148. This can provide additional context and depth to the research findings discussed herein.

Axis Coding Findings

The codes generated as a result of open coding analysis of the data obtained in this study were grouped under 257 subcategories in the axis coding stage. The 257 categories formed as a result of the classification of the codes obtained in the open coding phase were grouped into 65 categories. Due to the high number of codes obtained during open coding (n = 11706), the presentation of the findings was carried out through subcategories. The grounded theory was revealed by classifying subcategories into categories, categories into themes and themes into dimensions.

Selective Coding Findings

As a result of the axis coding stage of the data obtained in this study, 257 subcategories and 65 categories were obtained. Among the categories, s*uccessful school principalship* was determinated as the core category and the embedded theory was revealed by combining the themes and dimensions created in the selective coding phase according to this core category. In this direction, 65 categories were classified as 16 themes and 4 dimensions on the axis of the core category and the grounded theory was revealed.

Building Grounded Theory: Contextual Successful School Principalship Model (CSSPM)

Based on the codes, subcategories, categories, themes and dimensions obtained, "Contextual Successful School Principalship Model (CSSPM)" was designed. CSSPM can be seen below:
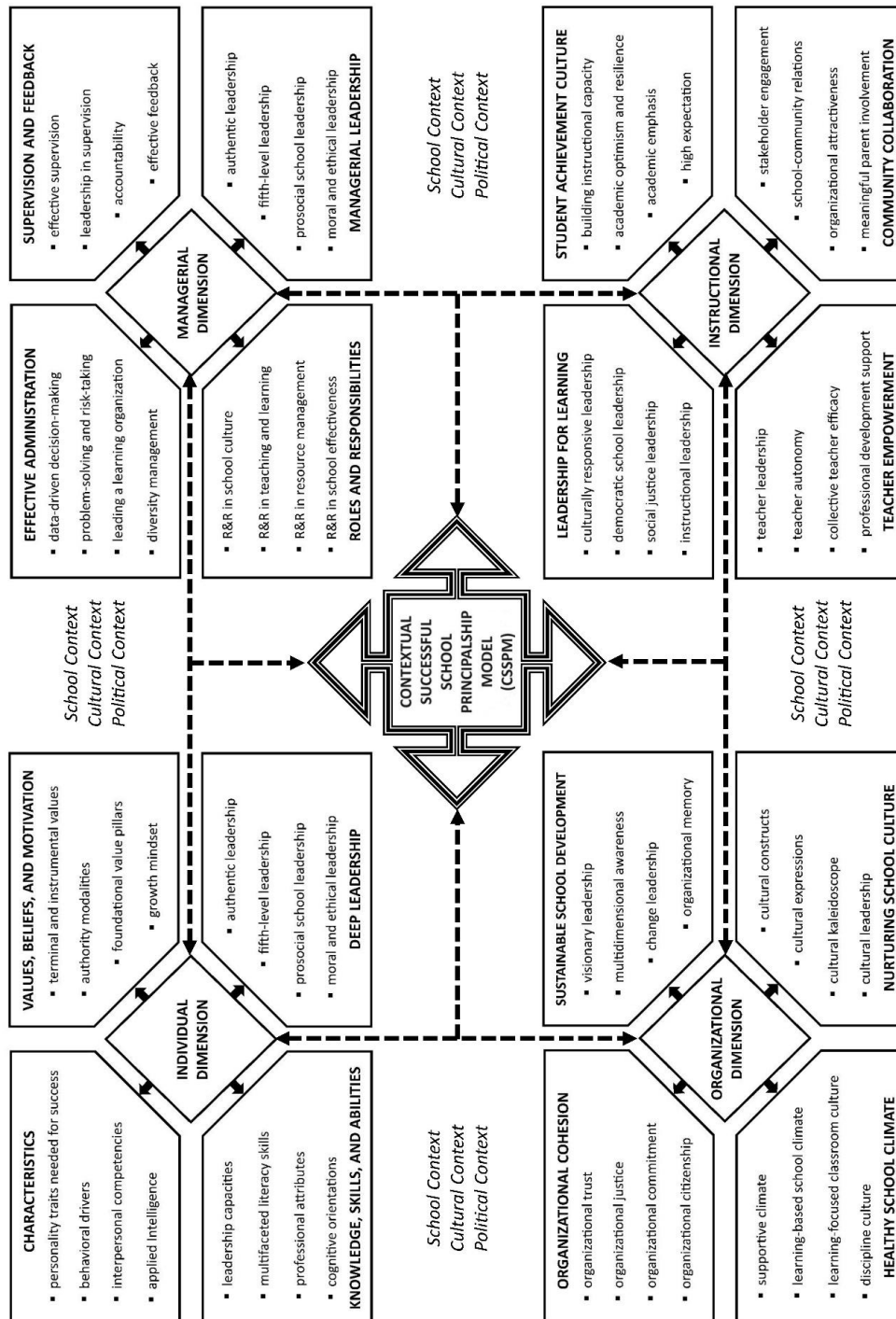

Figure 1. The Contextual Successful School Principalship Model (CSSPM)

Contextual Successful School Principalship Model (CSSPM) Evaluation (Validity) Standards

To ensure the validity of the theory constructed through SGTM, we addressed several critical questions. First, we confirmed that concepts (codes) generated during the analysis were systematically related to each other. This was achieved through open coding, which was continuously updated and compared with previously collected data, ensuring that each code was meaningfully related to sub-categories, categories, themes, and dimensions. Second, we formed categories based on the codes with sufficient conceptual saturation, resulting in 257 subcategories and 65 categories that adequately explained the phenomenon under consideration.

The grounded theory was further validated by ensuring the codes and categories were relevant to the subject matter, producing 11706 codes, 257 subcategories, 65 categories, 16 themes, and 4 dimensions, all interconnected. The research process was transparently documented, detailing each step from participant identification to model formation. The phenomenon was successfully transformed into a theory during the selective coding stage, using abstract terms at the hierarchical level, culminating in a four-dimensional "Contextual Successful School Principalship Model in Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Schools." This model includes propositions that contribute to the literature on educational administration and offers a comprehensive perspective on successful school principalship, centered on the core category of contextual successful school principalship. Data saturation was achieved with contributions from 1029 participants and additional sources like school strategic plans and media accounts. Thus, the proposed theory was compared with the previous studies, based on the four dimensions of individual, managerial, organizational, and instructional aspects of successful principals in the challenging schools.

Thus, the CSSPM can be regarded as a valid and sound model since it came from a process of systematic qualitative analysis. This is perhaps due to the fact that the model employs a large number of cases and adheres to the stipulated rules on coding the data. The links between the codes, categories, and themes confirm the model's credibility and usability in the area of research. This theoretical framework could be of great reference to the academics, the practitioners, and the policy makers to comprehend the factors that define an successful school principal in the ever changing socio-economic circumstance. It depicts the nature of leadership for enhanced learning in schools and gives a framework that can be utilized for enhancing education in disadvantaged settings.

Discussion

In this study, we built a successful school principalship model in socio-economically disadvantaged contexts, namely the CSSPM. In the previous literature, there are some models which corroborate with our model, the CSSPM (e.g. Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2017; Mbokazi, 2013; Raihani, 2008; Santaella, 2018), whereas there exist others that have differences (e.g. Copland & Knapp, 2006; Gurr, 2017; Mulford, 2007; Pashiardis & Brauckmann, 2014; Walker & Dimmock, 2005).

Hallinger (2011), for example, brought out other considerations like societal culture, institutional system, staff and community characteristics, and the school organization, which relates with the current model's contextual factors. Among the analyses offered by Leithwood

et al. (2017) those are the rational path, the emotional appeal, the organizational story, and the family story referring to the holistic approach in our model. Mbokazi (2013) described strategic, regulatory, pedagogic, and compensatory aspects. All of Raihani's (2008) identified strategy formulation, personal and professional capacity building, organization capacity building and school connection, collaboration, and partnership are well aligned with the organization dimension in this study. These are in line with the elements of our research work as Santaella (2018) also pointed out on the objectives of establishing goal, developing the stakeholders, teaching and learning program, and organizational cohesion and coordination.

On the other hand, there were studies with results that did not support the feature identified by our model. Unlike our outlined model, Copland and Knapp (2006) focused on the behaviors of successful principals in disadvantaged schools with the dimensions of curriculum and instruction, assessment and evaluation, accountability, school structure and culture, student support and learning, and professional learning. Gurr (2017) described capacity building for employees, profession, organisation, and communities, contrast with individual and instructional dimensions. In addition to covering these areas, by presenting a broader spectrum of aspects similar to those mentioned by Mulford (2007), including contextual awareness and support, and principal's values, the capacity and culture of the school, the organizational structure, vision and mission statements, instructional activities and learning achievements, individual development and training, school success notably in student outcomes, social changes, and monitoring and reflection. Other leadership styles which were mentioned by Pashiardis and Brauckmann (2014) as instructional, participative, personnel development, entrepreneurial, and structuring leadership did not fit into our model's more precise distinctions of leadership types. Moreover, Walker and Dimmock (2005) did specify the organizational structures, leadership and management, curriculum and teaching and learning but, they addressed different elements than the framework of our model specifies. Considering these similarities and differences, we can note that this may be due to the contexts and methods in which the studies were conducted as well as the contextual nature of successful school principalship.

The term theory is one of the four key components of school leadership, along with policy, research and practice. Theory in school leadership provides important clues about how schools are managed and led and is important in two ways: (a) it allows us to understand and interpret the behaviors of school leaders and (b) the school leadership behaviors that emerge from theory provide guidance to school principals (Bush & Jackson, 2002). From this point of view, it can be stated that the theory has an aspect that reaches the general public rather than a specific group individually or collectively. From this point of view, we note that the model created in this study will contribute to the understanding of successful school principalship in socioeconomically disadvantaged schools and provide guidance to practitioners.

The expression "Contextual Successful School Principalship Model (CSSPM) was used to emphasise that successful school principalship is a multidimensional phenomenon. The term "contextual" in the name of the model was preferred to draw attention to the contextual aspect of successful school principalship and to reveal how much it depends on certain conditions. In the literature, there are many studies showing that successful school principalship emerges in different ways in different countries, different cultures, different settlements, different educational systems, and that each situation has its own specific contexts (e.g. Belchetz, & Leithwood, 2007; Gu, & Johansson, 2013; Gurr, 2014; Leithwood, 2012; Pashiardis, & Johansson, 2021; Tan, 2016). On the other hand, Day (2007) stated that the term "successful" to be wider than the term "effectiveness," since the latter can be articulated more quantitatively

in terms of the outcomes and behaviors that are observable, while the term "successful" also encompasses the term "effectiveness" although, the latter does not include the term "successful" (p. 15). Using Day's argument presented here, we note that this particular point relies upon the literature of effective school research. For instance, the clarity in efficient school research is determined quantitatively as well as the tools that may be clinically observed. Based on these criteria, the presence of a school principal in a school, who has already been successful is considered among the factors of success in the research in addition to those points presented in the literature. For this reason, in the CSSPM, the reason why the term "successful" is preferred and the term "effectiveness" is not used instead is because the term "successful" is more inclusive than the latter. Again, in the research by Day (2022), it was emphasized that up to now, empirical evidence strongly suggests that the terms "principal leadership," "effective principal leadership," and "successful principal leadership" are empirically indistinguishable and practically considered to represent successful leadership (p. 120).

When the models related to successful school principalship are analyzed in the literature, the basic leadership practices of school principals are defined as purposes, people, structures and social systems by Hallinger and Heck (1999). Conger and Kanungo (1998) identified visioning strategies, efficacy-building strategies, and context changing strategies, whereas Leithwood (2012) identified setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional programme. Such leaderships as educational leadership, strategic leadership, responsive leadership and cultural leadership were defined by Hooker (2000) as structural school leadership, human resource oriented school leadership, political school leadership, cultural school leadership and educational school leadership. Gurr (1996) also identified learning and teaching, symbolic and cultural awareness, future orientation, accountability and personal characteristics. Gurr and Drysdale (2008) identified personal capacity, professional capacity, organisational capacity and community capacity. It is seen that the dimensions of successful school principalship models obtained in the literature are similar to each other. When evaluated within the scope of this research, instructional, managerial, organisational and instructional dimensions were obtained. From this point of view, we conclude that the grounded theory obtained in this study overlaps with the studies in the literature to a great extent.

Mashayekhi et al. (2020) developed a model of successful school principalship as a result of their research with the grounded theory approach and defined the dimensions of the model as causal factors, phenomenological factors, contextual factors leadership, intervention factors, strategies and outcomes. In some studies in the literature, it has been found that the motivations of school principals to be successful are strong accountability politics (Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood, 2001). For the SSPs in this study, both of these conditions were not the case. We found that the motivations of the principals in this study to be successful compared to their peers were mostly intrinsic motivators such as personal values and conscientious accountability. This might be attributed to the differences in the educational environment and cultural factors that shape the principals' beliefs and concerns. Further, individual circumstances of their schools, which they attend, might also influence the level of intrinsic motivation. Moreover, employees' experiences and each school leader's approach to leadership can also have a large impact on the motivational factors.

The most recent research on successful principals continues to provide new findings in addition to the large number of studies in the literature (e.g. Gordon, & Hart, 2022). Johansson and Ärlestig (2022) evaluated the 20-year history of ISSPP research, which started in 2001, and reached some conclusions: (a) Successful schools are dynamic, policy-influenced schools, (b)

Successful schools are significantly influenced by principals' management skills, personality traits and leadership styles, (c) Success is achieved through direct and indirect layering of values, beliefs, strategies, actions and relationships, (d) Successful principals are not people who do everything they are told; they are successful in how they think and feel, who they are, what they do, how and when they do it.

The successful school principals in this present study, similarly, exhibit several unique characteristics that distinguish them from those described in the existing literature. These principals are often born and raised in the same community as their schools, providing them with an in-depth understanding of the local context. They frequently demonstrate paternalistic leadership qualities, including dedication, sacrifice, service orientation, intrinsic motivation, and the ability to influence stakeholders. Additionally, they exhibit nearly all attitudes and behaviors associated with servant leadership and conduct their administrative duties in alignment with national and spiritual values. These principals display high levels of patriotism and nationalism, which are reflected in their daily routines and practices, and prioritize moral accountability above all other forms of accountability. They strategically engage student mothers in academic socialization to directly enhance student success, and they are bold in removing bureaucratic obstacles, taking necessary risks and initiatives for the benefit of students and teachers. Despite lacking formal authority to select deputy principals and teachers, they achieve high efficiency with their current team. Notably, many of these principals come from a background as primary school teachers, which influences their leadership style and effectiveness. From this point of view, it can be argued that the model obtained in this study was developed in parallel with the findings of the studies on successful school principalship, especially the ISSPP, in accordance with the contextual nature of successful school principalship.

Conclusion

The SSPs in this study share numerous characteristics with those identified in previous literature, particularly studies from the ISSPP (e.g., Goode, Drysdale, Gurr, 2023; Johnson, Moyi, Ylimaki, 2023; Moral-Santaella & Raso-Sánchez, 2023). Consistent with these studies, the SSPs in our research exhibit effective communication and listening skills and are noted for their honesty, reliability, ethics, enterprising spirit, invincibility, patience, sincerity, optimism, and visionary outlook. They possess high contextual awareness and have a significant impact on student achievement, teachers' job satisfaction, effective performance, and school development. These principals implement most of their practices through teachers, indirectly influencing student achievement. They emphasize teacher empowerment, create space for teacher leaders, ensure a culture of success and learning by setting high expectations, and prioritize learning within their schools. Additionally, they exhibit academic optimism, social trust towards teachers, and collective teacher self-efficacy, maintaining close communication and cooperation with both internal and external stakeholders.

Despite these similarities, the SSPs in our study also demonstrate unique characteristics that set them apart from those described in previous literature, thereby contributing new insights to the field. These principals are predominantly born and raised in the same community as their schools, providing them with an in-depth understanding of the local context. They frequently display paternalistic leadership qualities, such as dedication, sacrifice, service orientation, intrinsic motivation, and the ability to influence stakeholders. Furthermore, they exhibit nearly all attitudes and behaviors associated with servant leadership and align their actions with national and spiritual values. These principals exhibit high levels of patriotism and nationalism,

which are reflected in their daily routines, and prioritize moral accountability above all other forms of accountability.

Moreover, these SSPs adopt strategic models that engage student mothers in academic socialization in order to improve the students' performance. They are bold in fighting through bureaus, taking risks and seizing opportunities on students and teachers' behalf. Although, the present leadership structure does not empower them to appoint deputy principals and teachers, they have compiled good results from the existing staff. In particular, it can be pointed out that many of these principals have a primary school teaching background, which affects their leadership in one way or another. All these characteristics and behaviors present new insights into the successful principals in the school setting and thus contribute to the existing literature.

Limitations, and Recommendations for Future Research

Despite the findings of this study being useful, there are several limitations that should be taken into consideration to increase the validity of the conclusions in future research. First of all, the present study was limited to the Amasya, Çorum, Samsun, and Tokat provinces in Türkiye. This may not exhaust the various educational settings in Türkiye; hence, the validity of the findings might be questionable. Secondly, the study mainly used the qualitative data collection techniques. Although the described methods offered rich understanding of the phenomena, they may have further restricted the transferability of the findings. Further, because of the study's focus on socio-economically disadvantaged schools, the findings of the study may not be generalizable to other schools. Thus, for the future research it is recommended to investigate successful school principalship in different regions of Türkiye to include more cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Further research works that analyse the various regions or provinces with unique characteristics would better explain successful school leadership. To increase the validity and transferability of the findings, it would be useful to collect both qualitative and quantitative data within the given study. Longitudinal studies that establish the effectiveness of leadership practices during the course of a school's performance would also enhance the understanding of the continuity of successful leadership practices.

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations may be made to policy makers and in-service school leaders. It is recommended that policies affecting the selection and training of school principals should be reviewed so as to capture personality characteristics that are typical of successful leaders. Some of the characteristics which define the personality include communication skills, determination, vision, passion to transform people's lives and high level of consciousness. Also, fostering organizational culture that makes the school leaders to feel appreciated and to be trusted will improve their performance. This entails promoting the culture of justice, openness and accountability while at the same eliminating the bureaucratic barriers that affect successful leadership.

Therefore it is argued that for the in-service school administrators, intrinsic motivation and personal values should be a high leadership practice priority. The SSPs usually work according to the national and ethical values, which are evident in patriotism and nationalism in their activities. Leaders should aim at encouraging and empowering the school communities by demonstrating commitment, serving and advocating for the stakeholders. Focusing on the moral responsibility and active engagement of student parents particularly the mothers can improve students' accomplishments. Principals should also be courageous in handling bureaucratic issues, come up with measures that will favor students and teachers, and achieve a lot with the available resources. Thus, following these practices, school administrators are able to foster a

healthy and productive school environment, which is likely to bring about continued excellence and learning among students.

It is therefore useful for the policy makers to consider such selection criteria for principals of schools as resilience, effective communication skills, forward thinking, passion to make a difference. In addition, it is also important to put in place training programs that would help in the nurturing of these attributes together with the professional knowledge and skills. These ought to be some of the facets that must be incorporated in the leadership training programs; Intrinsic motivation and moral values. Also, policy makers should put in place policies that encourage positive working culture that makes school leaders feel appreciated. Ensuring that there is justice, accountability and transparency in schools is important and eliminating things that make it difficult to lead. It is quite important that the school principals be given the freedom to make whatever decisions that may be in the best interest of the schools.

In the case of in-service school principals, it is crucial to act based on one's motivation and principles of the business, which is consistent with the national and moral principles. This paper now finds that patriotism and nationalism are usually present in successful school principals and their work. The leaders should model, lead, and support the school communities through commitment, service, and involvement. Other key practices include moral accountability as the supreme accountability and the deliberate efforts to involve student parents especially the mothers in academic socialization with the aim of improving their success rates.

The administrators should also risk and be courageous enough to deal with bureaucratic problems and issues that affect students and teachers. The problem of high efficiency with the existing staff and the lack of a right to appoint deputy principals and teachers is rather urgent. Creating a culture of teamwork in between teachers and other personnel of the school to achieve school goals can contribute much to the improvement of academic performance.

Acknowledgments

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Schools

School Code	Settlement Type	Combined Primary and Secondary School	Number of Teachers	Number of Students	Number of Classrooms	Transported Education Percentage
A	Village	Yes	36-40	501-550	26-30	100%
B	Village	Yes	16-20	101-150	6-10	22%
C	Village	No	11-15	51-100	6-10	90%
Ç	Village	Yes	16-20	151-200	6-10	100%
D	District	Yes	26-30	301-350	16-20	-
E	District	No	11-15	201-250	6-10	83%
F	Town	Yes	11-15	151-200	6-10	9%
G	Town	Yes	6-10	51-100	11-15	20%
Ğ	Village	Yes	16-20	101-150	11-15	61%
H	Combined District	No	26-30	251-300	16-20	12%
I	District	No	21-25	401-450	11-15	-
İ	District	No	51-55	801-850	26-30	-
J	Village	Yes	11-15	151-200	21-25	82%
K	District	Yes	36-40	451-500	6-10	17%
L	Village	Yes	11-15	101-150	6-10	21%
M	District	No	16-20	201-250	11-15	-
N	District	No	6-10	101-150	6-10	-
O	District	No	31-35	601-650	16-20	-
Ö	Combined District	Yes	36-40	501-550	21-25	2%
P	District	No	11-15	151-200	11-15	28%
R	Village	No	6-10	51-100	11-15	73%
S	District	No	31-35	451-500	16-20	-
Ş	District	No	16-20	251-300	6-10	-
T	District	Yes	26-30	351-400	16-20	-
U	Combined District	Yes	36-40	451-500	16-20	6%
Ü	District	No	36-40	651-700	21-25	-
V	District	Yes	36-40	501-550	21-25	-
Y	District	No	11-15	101-150	6-10	-
Z	Village	Yes	11-15	101-150	11-15	-

Appendix 2. Personal and Professional Characteristics of SSPs

Successful School Principal	Age	Total rofessional Seniority (years)	Teaching Seniority (years)	Deputy Directorate Seniority (years)	School Director Seniority (Year)	Length of Service at this School (years)
Hikmet	41-45	25	6-10	-	16-20	8
Yekta	36-40	16	1-5	1-5	11-15	6
Zeynep	41-45	21	6-10	6-10	1-5	5
Ertuğrul	36-40	18	6-10	1-5	6-10	5
Kuzey	41-45	21	6-10	6-10	1-5	5
Ali Kemal	36-40	14	1-5	6-10	1-5	4
Birol	41-45	20	6-10	-	11-15	6
Ahmet	51-55	24	6-10	6-10	11-15	7
Eren	41-45	19	1-5	1-5	11-15	5
Abdullah	41-45	19	6-10	1-5	6-10	6
Eymen	36-40	16	6-10	1-5	6-10	6
Hüseyin	56-60	36	11-15	-	21-25	8
Yusuf	36-40	14	1-5	1-5	11-15	5
İbrahim	51-55	30	6-10	-	21-25	8
Mehmet	31-35	11	1-5	1-5	1-5	4
Yavuz	36-40	18	1-5	6-10	11-15	6
Gökay	46-50	23	6-10	1-5	11-15	4
Faruk	41-45	24	1-5	6-10	11-15	4
Kerim	41-45	17	6-10	1-5	6-10	4
Efnan	41-45	18	1-5	1-5	6-10	4
Mustafa	36-40	14	6-10	1-5	1-5	5
Devlet	41-45	19	6-10	1-5	6-10	4
Aydın	46-50	20	11-15	-	6-10	4
Kemal	61-65	44	6-10	6-10	26-30	7
Ümit	61-65	43	1-5	-	36-40	7
Muhammed	51-55	30	6-10	6-10	11-15	6
Serkan	46-50	25	11-15	1-5	11-15	5
Murat	51-55	32	21-25	-	6-10	5
Cem	36-40	15	6-10	-	6-10	6